

## feeding . . . gathering . . . carrying . . . leading . (Isaiah 40:11)

March 17, 2009

Dear Church Family,

In Mark 7 we see the Pharisees and some teachers of the Law from Jerusalem questioning Jesus about his disciples eating with “unclean” hands. We have seen these people before in the story (chapters 2 and 3). Here they continue to look for ways to criticize Jesus, accusing Jesus’ disciples of conduct that violates godliness and holiness. This is about more than the practice of hand washing. The issue is the whole question of how faithful Jews should conduct themselves living in the midst of Gentiles. We have already seen that the Pharisees viewed sinners as people with a contagious disease that were a threat to contaminate the community. That is why they object to Jesus eating with sinners (2:15-17). Their view of Gentiles and Gentile culture is similar; they are a threat to holiness and Jewish purity. That is why they wash, especially after being in the market place where there is contact with Gentiles and unfaithful Jews. The mention of the market place provides a contrast between them and Jesus. We have just seen Jesus in market places in the previous scene, healing all who touch his cloak (6:56). He is not contaminated but rather heals. Just like with the healing of the leper in chapter 1. So Jesus in the market place heals all who touch Him and the Pharisees want to talk about hand washing.

Jesus’ response to the Pharisees is highly critical. He goes on the attack, quoting Isaiah and accusing them of being hypocrites. Just like the church in Sardis that Stuart preached on last week, they have a reputation for holiness and godliness, but it is only among men, not God. *“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”* The Pharisees were intensely interested in the question Stuart asked last week, “What are the marks of holiness or hearts that are close to God?” They wanted to identify behaviors that Jews could practice that would guard against the danger of straying away from devotion to Yahweh, particularly in the midst of pagan culture. For them, hand washing was one of those marks for it signified a commitment to holiness. Their concern for personal holiness was admirable, but Jesus declares that something has gone wrong in their pursuit. In pondering Stuart’s question last week, I noticed that whatever I identified as a mark of true godliness was not necessarily a mark of genuine spirituality. All of them could be pursued and expressed for fleshly reasons. In fact, it is precisely when they are practiced as marks of devotion that the motivation of pleasing men rather than God begins to creep in. This is exactly why Jesus warns *“be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them.”* (Mt 6:1). Although they thought they were close to God, the Pharisees were primarily motivated by gaining a reputation amongst men. This is a danger that we all face as we pursue our own spirituality.

Not only were they hypocrites, but the Pharisees were also guilty of nullifying the commands of God with the traditions that they created. They considered themselves as the protectors of the law, but were actually undermining God’s law and purposes. Jesus provides the example of Corban and is indicating that hand washing was guilty of the same thing.

Jesus calls the crowd to himself to make an important point. *“Nothing outside a man can make him unclean by going into him. Rather it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean.”* We may nod our heads at this statement, but that is only because we are so far removed from the Jewish roots of our faith. A familiarity with Leviticus



and the chapters on what defiles would certainly make it difficult to understand this statement. This is why the disciples must ask Jesus to explain. In that explanation, we see that there is still a concern with purity and defilement, but the emphasis is on the heart as the crucial area. It is what comes out of the heart that defiles a man. And in the list that Jesus gives, it is the first item that should get our attention, evil thoughts. Evil thoughts, by themselves, defile us. It is not enough to keep them from becoming action. Do we truly believe this or do we act as if they are only pre-sin and are okay as long as they do not become action? We would do well to exercise the kind of vigilance over our thoughts that the Pharisees did with their outward traditions of holiness. Concern for purity of thought requires this type of attention. And there is little danger of this being about seeking reputation since our thoughts are not evident to others.

Mark adds a comment to Jesus' explanation, "*In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.*" With this statement, Mark is addressing the controversy confronting his first readers over whether Gentile believers need to adhere to Jewish dietary laws. This is a radical departure from Leviticus in which Yahweh strictly forbids the eating of certain animals. How do we understand this reversal? First, such a reversal could only come from one with the authority of God Himself so this is a further claim of Jesus to divinity. We can see two reasons for this reversal. One, the original commands were not serving the intended purpose. The dietary laws were meant make Jews constantly aware of God's holiness and purity. In this role, they were meant to lead people to Christ (Gal 3:24), preparing them to receive His sacrifice for their purification. However, in practice, Pharisees and others used them to establish their own reputation for holiness, taking pride in their own adherence to laws and traditions. Second, the practice of these purity codes had become a major hindrance to God's purpose of salvation for the Gentiles. We see this in Acts 10 where Peter needs the vision of being told to eat unclean animals in order to understand that he is to associate with Gentiles to bring them the message of salvation. Prior to this, Peter believed "*it is against our law for Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him.*" How is the gospel going to go to the Gentiles if that is the relationship between Jews and Gentiles?

This second reason for the reversal is highlighted in the stories that follow, the Syro Phoenician woman, healing of the deaf man, and the feeding of the 4,000. Setting is important as each of these take place in Gentile territories. The woman shares similarities with Jairus (ch 5); she approaches Jesus the same way (publicly at his feet begging) and asks for her little daughter who is at home. However, while Jairus is a respected synagogue official, she is a Gentile woman. Jesus' initial response is disturbing because it appears to be rude and racist at worst. (To hear an explanation for this, you will need to listen to the sermon). In the end, however, Jesus grants her request, clearly indicating that the kingdom of God is for the Gentiles as well. We noted how effortlessly the deliverance takes place. Jesus does not even need to be present. This shows that there is plenty of God's power available and there is no need for Jews to jealously guard a privileged position with God.

The next story takes place in the region of Decapolis, the area that the man with the legion of demons has been spreading his story (5:20). It is highly symbolic and significant that a deaf man is given the ability to hear in a Gentile region. Jesus is giving the Gentiles "ears to hear" the good news. The story of the feeding of 4,000 takes place in that same region. This is a crowd who has been with Jesus for three days, some traveling long distances. Evidently they are responding to His teaching and receiving the word. They receive the same miraculous provision that recalls Yahweh's provision for Israel in the desert, a further indication that the Kingdom of God is for Jews and Gentiles.

Mark 7-8:10 raises two important considerations that relate to our own spirituality. We must be on guard to not practice our spirituality for the sake of reputation, our honor rather than honoring God. And we need to be alert to how our spiritual practices affect our relationship with people outside of our Christian communities. After all, we are still to be fishers of men. God's design is to reach those people through us.

May Christ always shine brightly through us,  
Bo

<http://www.christourshepherd.org/pastlet.htm> (and follow links to download MP3 audio file of sermon)

## Announcements

We are having a water **baptism service on April 19**. Please contact the office to reserve your place! A pre-baptism class will be held before the service on April 5 for adults, and on March 29 for any children or youth considering baptism.

The next **Evening of Healing Prayer** will be on Tuesday, March 31. If you would like an appointment for healing prayer, or if you would like to come and sit in the sanctuary during the evening, call Deborah at the office (202-544-9599) by Friday, March 27.

### FREE Apologetics Evangelism Seminar Series

- *Apologetics Evangelism with Postmodern People*, April 3-4 with Prof. Jerram Barrs
- *Tactics in Defending the Faith*, May 15-16 with Greg Koukl

*These will both be at McLean Presbyterian Church. Free attendance with registration at [www.cslewisinstitute.org](http://www.cslewisinstitute.org)*

**COSC Softball Team**—The Flock is in need of female players. We will be playing on Monday evenings at 7:00pm. Email Matt Tropiano at [Matthew.Tropiano@navy.mil](mailto:Matthew.Tropiano@navy.mil) or Anne Hall at [anne.hall16@gmail.com](mailto:anne.hall16@gmail.com) to learn more! Registration will be about \$30/person for the city softball league fee.

### Care Company Opportunities:

(202-422-7032 or [monique@carecompanydc.org](mailto:monique@carecompanydc.org))

- The next ***Righteous Renovation*** is an urban collaboration with other local non-profits to build a playground at Hopkins. Come and help on the planning committee!
- ***Adult Literacy Volunteer***—We are looking for men interested in mentoring men from Central Union Mission who have a desire to learn to read. Please contact us ASAP if you would like to find out more information.

**Intercession News:** “Seek God For The City 2009” (Feb. 25 to Apr. 5) booklets available. Suggested donation \$3.

The next Night of Prayer will be April 4, from 6pm to midnight. Watch this space for more info!

### For the men of COSC:

Men's Breakfast, 28 March, 9-1030 AM.  
Start time at 9:00

Testimony Experience: Brent McBurney  
Discussion and Challenge to follow.  
Child Care will be provided

### For the women of COSC:

- **Saturday Supper** on this Saturday (March 21), 6pm-8pm at the church. Supper will be a baked potato bar with fun toppings. Come hungry and bring a dessert! A video will be played after dinner with a discussion following. The video is of a remarkable woman, Jean Darnall, who has witnessed the power of God throughout her life. The topic of the discussion will be the place of signs and wonders in today's world. Come with your questions!
- On **April 13, the next book club meeting** will be held at Laurie Chenoweth's house to discuss the book *Expecting Adam* by Martha Beck.
- **Women's Retreat June 6-7** at the Bishop Claggett retreat center in Maryland

## Bulletin Board

*Postings not officially sanctioned by COSC.*

JESSE TREE BANNER WORKSHOP: “Christmas in July”. During the workshop, each participant/family will create a custom made Jesse Tree Banner and all associated elements. Contact Amy if you're interested in learning more. She'll send you all the pertinent details. Amy, 202-549-1112 or [amyherbert@verizon.net](mailto:amyherbert@verizon.net)

HOUSING—Brookland/Catholic Univ: 4BR, 2.5 BA four story house with semi-finished basement & backyard. W/D, Central AC, dishwasher, parking. 7 minute walk to red line metro (Rhode Island Av). \$3000/mo, 1 year lease, security deposit, application & credit check. Available mid-April. Tom and Dee Scriven, 703-403-5026

JOB OPENING: Capitol Hill Pregnancy Center is looking for a part-time book-keeper/office manager. Need general office skills, must be organized; experience in or ability to adapt to donor base technology and computer finance record-keeping. Janet Durig, 202-546-1018